

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Tonto Rim American Legion Post 69
709 E. Highway 260
Payson, AZ 85541-4938
Saturday, April 14, 2007

MINUTES

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Chairman Ellis. The Posting of the Colors was done by the Payson Honor Guard. Chairman Ellis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members Present

Advisory Commission Members

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Joe Bibich
Gary Fredricks
Tom Heaney
Phillip Quochytewa
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Lee Borgen, ADVS Vets' Benefit Counselor

Members Absent

Tom Dingwall, Vice Chair
Linda Fulkerson

Introductions: Chairman Ellis introduced Payson Mayor Bob Edwards. Mayor Edwards thanked the Commissioners for coming to Payson and encouraged attendees to actively participate by giving ideas to the Commission and through it to the Governor.

Chairman Ellis expressed appreciation to the Mayor for his presence and remarks, and thanked the staff of Post 69 and the Payson Honor Guard for their roles in hosting the meeting. He gave a brief explanation of the makeup and purpose of the Commission and why the Commission was in Payson. He also advised the attendees that the Commission is seeking nominations from Veterans Service Organizations for three new Commissioners to fill seats of those whose terms are expiring or vacant. Each Commissioner gave a self-introduction with a brief bio. Chairman Ellis recognized Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefits Counselor and Women Veterans Representative from Lake Havasu City, as serving as secretary for the meeting.

Recognized Guests – Susan Henderson, OIF/OEF Expedite Team Coach, VA Regional Office, Phoenix, and Daniel Collins, Chief of Pharmacy and Specialty Care, Northern AZ VA Health Care System, Prescott.

Approval of Minutes – The minutes of the March 8, 2007 meeting were approved as written.

Agency Update – Chairman Ellis reported the following:

- He provided a brief statement on current events affecting the Department and the State Veterans Home in Phoenix, expressing the Commission's regret for all that has happened, and assuring everyone that ADVS and the Home are running well. Pat Chorprenning's resignation is a great loss to the Arizona veteran community. He has done a tremendous amount for Arizona's 650,000 veterans.

- Chairman Ellis has met with Gregg Maxon, acting director of ADVS, and is confident that projects in place such as the Veterans Home in Tucson and the cemetery for northern Arizona will continue to move forward. Most of the issues with the Home were addressed before the media frenzy broke.
- One of the five Veterans Expos funded in the current budget will be held in Tucson on April 28 at the VA Medical Center. He gave a brief description of the expo and noted that Payson may want to entertain hosting one in the future.
- The Freedom License Plate went on sale earlier this year and is available to anyone who wants to show support for veterans and our Nation. The Veteran Plate is available for veterans and their immediate families. Both plates are \$25 per year with \$17 being a tax deductible donation to the Arizona Veterans Donation Fund.
- The Arizona Veterans Registration Form will allow the Department to keep Arizona's veterans informed of important issues. Chairman Ellis urged attendees to complete the form and either give it to one of the Commissioners or mail it in, and to take additional forms for fellow veterans not in attendance. He assured everyone that the information on the forms is for the Department's use only and will not be sold or given to anyone else.
- The Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame is accepting nominations for its 2007 Induction Ceremony. Chairman Ellis stressed that inductees are not being honored for their military service but rather for what their service to community and country since separation from the military. Based on the nominations received, the Governor selects up to 20 inductees each year. The Commission is not involved in the selection process.

Strategic Plan Overview – Chairman Ellis explained the region setup and introduced Phillip Quochytewa as the Commissioner representing the Payson four-county region. Chairman Ellis is filling in as the second Commissioner representing Region 2 due to a vacancy on the Commission. Commissioner Quochytewa welcomed everyone, thanked them for coming, and stressed that the Commission meetings outside Maricopa County are for the Commissioners to listen, not to speak. While the Commission can only work on State issues, it can and does pass to appropriate agencies issues of a Federal nature. With that, the meeting was opened to the town hall forum.

Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order – Commissioner Quochytewa began by addressing the question cards turned in by the attendees.

- What can be done about the \$3000 annual tax exemption on the home of a 100% disabled veteran when the assessed valuation of the home used for tax purposes continues to skyrocket?
 - ❖ Commissioner Bibich noted a House bill to amend the State constitution to remedy this condition. He will research and get back to the questioner.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis also will research all state bills that pertain to veterans and get the information out to the Department Commanders. He also encouraged all attendees to keep in touch with their elected officials.
- There should not be a fee for the Purple Heart License Plate. The veteran has paid enough for it through the injuries sustained to be awarded it.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis agreed, noting that one of the goals of the Veterans Donation Fund, depending upon the success of the Freedom and Veterans License Plates, is to eventually provide all veterans plates free.

- There were several issues concerning dissatisfaction with the Payson VA Clinic. The clinic belongs to Phoenix VA despite the fact that Prescott is more convenient for the Payson veteran community, primarily due to traffic conditions around Phoenix. Veterans signed up with the Payson clinic are forced to use the VAMC in Phoenix and the Payson clinic will not serve patients signed up with Prescott VAMC.
 - ❖ Daniel Collins responded that the problem is simply funding. Payson is in the Phoenix catchment area, yet many Payson veterans are registered with the Prescott VAMC. People registered with VAMC Prescott cannot be served by the Payson clinic because VAMC cannot get any credit or Federal money for treating them. And vice versa. What's really difficult to understand is that veterans in the Anthem clinic want to go to Phoenix but the clinic belongs to Prescott!
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis suggested that this issue is a good one to bring to the attention of the Arizona Veterans' Research Council. He explained that the Council was established by the Governor by Executive Order 2007-2008 to follow up on recommendations that grew out of the Veterans Task Force of 2005. The Council is working on such things as ways to improve services to veterans in rural Arizona and the development of proposals to benefit disabled veterans, homeless veterans, women veterans, and guard and reserve personnel. The Council is expected to provide its final recommendations to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House during the first week of January 2008.
- Another issue pertaining to the Payson clinic pertains to travel reimbursement when the clinic refers a veteran to some other facility. The referred travel is considered to be discretionary on the part of the veteran because the care should be available at the Payson clinic since travel is only paid from home to the Payson clinic. This assumption is not true, however, since the Payson clinic does not provide primary care and has to refer most patients. When a referral is done due to non-availability of service, the VA should pay travel to the required site. A related complaint concerned the rising cost of gasoline with no corresponding increase in VA travel reimbursement. Another complaint dealt with the fact that there is no urgent care for veterans in Payson and that it takes six weeks to get an appointment regardless of the problem. The general assessment is that Payson is a contract clinic and the staff has no interest in serving the veterans.
 - ❖ Daniel Collins noted that urgent care issues are normally sent out into the community under fee basis so the vet gets taken care of and VA pays the bill. He will pass this complaint to his Chief of Staff so it can be passed on to Phoenix as a problem in Payson that needs to be addressed.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis also assured the attendees that all of these issues would be considered by the Research Council and that the Commission would send a letter to the Director of the Phoenix VAMC highlighting the concerns raised in the Payson meeting.
- Someone needs to address benefits of veterans who are not disabled by VA standards and thus are not eligible for any VA medical services. Although this is a federal issue, the veterans live in Arizona and the state does nothing for veterans just because they are veterans. One example cited is the hunting and fishing license. All Arizona veterans should be entitled to free licenses, not just those 100% disabled, since some veterans in rural areas rely upon hunting and fishing for sustenance.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis again cited the tasking of the Research Council to find out what other states do to benefit their resident veteran community and to explore what may be appropriate for Arizona to adopt. He is confident that the Council will

develop many good ideas. But there will always be the problem of money. Veterans with questions, problems or suggestions should see their Veterans Benefits Counselor/Veterans' Service Officer to pass on information and/or explore entitlements.

- ❖ Commissioner Fredricks reported that veterans organizations lobby the Congress annually trying to get money for veterans' causes. There is a military coalition in Washington that tries to prioritize the issues and requests from the various organizations so that they can put collective strength behind the most pressing issues. Everyone needs to keep being vocal and contacting their legislators, state and federal.
- One question asked if it was true that the VA cut off medical care in 2003 to veterans in Categories 7 and 8.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis responded that VA Secretary Principi, under pressure to reduce budget demands, did cut off any treatment to new Category 7 and 8 veterans in 2003, but those currently enrolled in the VA system would continue to receive treatment. That policy remains in effect.
- One attendee cited financial problems with maintaining the homeless shelter that has been supported by the AMVETS post since 1993. It is in desperate need of funding.
 - ❖ Chairman Ellis will bring this to the attention of the Research Council subcommittee addressing homeless issues. He noted we sometimes forget that homeless issues exist throughout the state, not just in Tucson and Phoenix.
- The final issue brought before the Commission concerned the impression that a disabled veteran could not register to vote without being subject to being called to jury duty.
 - ❖ A response indicated that even though he might get a summons for jury duty, a doctor's statement would excuse him. Also, Chairman Ellis believes that only vehicle registration is used for jury duty lists and that voter registration is no longer involved.

Commissioner Quochytewa noted that it takes input from everyone to bring issues forward to the Research Council. He thanked the Post for hosting the meeting and the wonderful setup, and everyone for their participation in bringing up some very important issues. Again, the attendees were urged to stay in touch with their elected officials and hold them accountable for their votes and actions.

Adjournment – Chairman Ellis thanked everyone for their attendance and participation. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m. The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on May 10, 2007, at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012.